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SUBJECT: BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE USCCB AND CUBAN
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT ALARCON

Classified By: COM JONATHAN FARRAR FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) USINT COM and P/E officers met August 17 with a visiting U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) delegation (Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley, Orlando Bishop Thomas Wenski, San Antonio Auxiliary Bishop Oscar Cantu, and USCCB staffer Father Andrew Small) on its first day in Havana. USINT was able to brief the delegation on a number of issues and clarify several misconceptions on their part, including their belief the Department had never issued any visas to family members of the "Cuban Five." The delegation invited the COM to travel with some of them later in the week to Holguin and Guantanamo to view Caritas' hurricane relief efforts, and said they would raise the issue of travel restrictions in their meeting with Cuban National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon.

¶2. (C) The delegation members (please protect) later provided a readout to the COM on their meeting with Alarcon. According to Bishop Wenski, Alarcon was extremely positive in his remarks regarding Caritas and its aosQwdFuban Five's relatives than he had anticipated.

¶4. (C) Finally, Cardinal O'Malley said he raised the issue of USINT travel with the delegation to Holguin and Guantanamo, and that Alarcon had asked when that would be. When O'Malley replied, "tomorrow," Alarcon's response reportedly was, "you must really believe in miracles."

¶5. (C) Comment. While press coverage of the USCCB focused on their remarks regarding the trade embargo, we appreciate the delegation raising the issues of political prisoners and travel restrictions even if only during private meetings. It is helpful to have the GOC hear such messages from third parties other than the USG. The delegation's report on Alarcon's remarks on Caritas track with what we have heard here about the GOC's view from Cardinal Ortega and others, and from Caritas itself. End Comment.
FARRAR